

Report on Accusations of Witchcraft Against Children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

This report provides detailed evidence on the problem of child witchcraft accusations in Akwa Ibom State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

It also provides information on the activities of the charity Stepping Stones Nigeria which has been working in the Niger Delta since 2005.

The report has been prepared by Stepping Stones Nigeria in collaboration with those of our Nigerian partner organisations who specifically work on the issue of witchcraft accusations against children: Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation (SSNCEF) and Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD).

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Report on Accusations of Witchcraft Against Children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
Stepping Stones Nigeria
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Executive Summary

This report has been prepared by the UK-based charity, Stepping Stones Nigeria in collaboration with those of our Nigerian partner organisations who specifically work on the issue of witchcraft accusations against children: Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN), Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation (SSNCEF) and Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD).

The report provides detailed evidence on the nature and extent of child witchcraft accusations in Akwa Ibom State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It also provides information on the activities of Stepping Stones Nigeria which has been working in the Niger Delta since 2005.

The report provides evidence drawn from over 250 documented cases to demonstrate that accusations of witchcraft against children are a key child rights challenge within Akwa Ibom State. It also references the widespread national and international media coverage of this issue.

It is important to note that these case files and media coverage are thought to represent only a small fraction of the true number of children who suffer as a result of witchcraft accusations. Based on the patterns, scale and nature of the abuse of children that Stepping Stones Nigeria and our partner organisations have documented, we consider it extremely likely that many more cases exist of accusations of witchcraft against children and abuse of their rights as a result.

Analysis of these cases shows that children who are accused of witchcraft suffer significant abuse of their rights. In the most serious cases the child is killed. In other cases the child suffers serious forms of violence, including severe beatings, being burnt with fire or acid, being poisoned and being buried alive. A great many children – 81% of documented cases – are abandoned as a result of witchcraft

accusations, and usually end up living on the streets without access to food, water, shelter, medical care or education. There is also evidence to show that such children face increased vulnerability to other forms of exploitation such as child trafficking.

Witchcraft accusations against and the subsequent abuse of children are criminalised in Akwa Ibom State and there has been some positive action from police. However, Stepping Stones Nigeria is not aware of any successful prosecutions of those responsible for making accusations of witchcraft against children, despite this being a criminal act within Akwa Ibom State. Neither are we aware of any successful prosecution of those who carry out violent, abusive or murderous acts towards children who have been accused of witchcraft. This is a major area of concern.

Contributing factors to accusations of witchcraft against children include the teachings and actions of some Christian leaders, with 31% of children in the documented cases being accused by a pastor; poverty; lack of understanding of disabilities and diseases; and family breakdown, with 70% of cases concerning children from broken homes. Nollywood films which perpetuate the belief in child witches are also a factor.

Stepping Stones Nigeria was established in 2005. Since then, in partnership with local Nigerian organisations, it has: provided financial and capacity-raising resources to support the care of hundreds of children, engaged international agencies with the issue of child witchcraft accusations, conducted large-scale awareness-raising activities within Akwa Ibom State and launched an international campaign against child abuse – Prevent Abuse of Children Today (PACT).

Stepping Stones Nigeria believes passionately that all children in Nigeria deserve to have all of their rights upheld all of the time. No child should ever have their rights abused as a result of witchcraft accusations.

Recommendations:

Stepping Stones Nigeria believes that, through all relevant agencies working in partnership, a brighter future for Akwa Ibom State's children is indeed possible. We wish to commend the Akwa Ibom State Government for the very positive steps that have already been taken to fight the menace of child witchcraft accusations and provide compulsory free education to children in the state. We believe that these acts are groundbreaking not only in Nigeria but also in Africa. However, in order to prevent the ongoing abuses of child rights that unfortunately still take place in Akwa Ibom State today, Stepping Stones Nigeria recommends the following urgent actions to the Akwa Ibom State Government. **Stepping Stones Nigeria also offers any assistance that we can to the Akwa Ibom State Government to enable the comprehensive implementation of these recommendations.**

The Akwa Ibom State Government should:

1. Ensure that any accusations of witchcraft against children and/or any abuse of children who have been accused of witchcraft are investigated and punished in a thorough and robust manner. It is essential that the perpetrators of such abuse are brought to justice.
2. Ensure that all police, judiciary and child welfare teams receive comprehensive training on the provisions of the Child Rights Act, especially those which relate to accusations of witchcraft against children. The activities of these agencies should be regularly monitored to make sure that they are implementing these provisions in an effective and appropriate manner.

3. Re-launch the Child Rights Implementation Committee with a clear mandate to fight against witchcraft accusations. It should be provided with adequate resources and monitored by government and civil society.
4. Undertake widespread and vigorous awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public about child rights. There should be a particular focus on informing the public that it is illegal to accuse children of witchcraft and to abuse children who are believed to be witches. Information intended to demystify medical conditions, such as epilepsy and autism, which are often considered to be evidence of witchcraft should also be disseminated.
5. Work to address the belief in child witches as it is this belief that, ultimately, leads to the abuse of innocent children. In particular, the Akwa Ibom State Government should regulate churches, and should close any found to be carrying out child witchcraft accusations and abuse. Churches should also be required to adopt child protection policies and church leaders should receive training on child rights.
6. Continue to work closely with all other agencies, including NAP TIP, UNICEF and NGOs, to maximise expertise and resources in order to overcome the problem of witchcraft accusations against children, whilst ensuring that all children who have been accused of witchcraft receive appropriate care in line with their best interests.

1: Background information on Stepping Stones Nigeria

Stepping Stones Nigeria is a UK-based charity, which was established in 2005 by Mr Gary Foxcroft and Ms Naomi Chapple. Stepping Stones Nigeria's mission is to support the rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, such as the so-called child 'witches' in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Working with local partner organisations, Stepping Stones Nigeria provides education, shelter, healthcare and lasting hope for a brighter future. Through advocacy and research, Stepping Stones Nigeria campaigns at a local, national and international level to put a stop to the abuse of innocent children.

Stepping Stones Nigeria is registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales (Charity No. 1112476) and as a public limited company with Companies House, UK (Company No. 5413970). Evidence of Charity Commission and public limited company status is provided in **Appendix II**.

As a registered charity in England and Wales, Stepping Stones Nigeria is required by law to publish details of accounts each year. Full details of Stepping Stones Nigeria's accounts are provided in **Appendix II**.

Stepping Stones Nigeria receives funding from a number of sources. Some of our major donors include:

- Comic Relief
- Hope Aid Charitable Trust
- Body Shop Foundation
- Virgin Atlantic/ Virgin Trains

Stepping Stones Nigeria also receives individual donations from members of the public. Supporters of the charity also carry out fundraising activities and donate the money to Stepping Stones Nigeria.

Stepping Stones Nigeria works with a number of local Nigerian partner organisations to:

- Provide food, shelter, healthcare and education to children who have been accused of witchcraft
- Document and monitor cases of abuse of child rights across the Niger Delta region, including but not limited to cases where children have been accused of witchcraft
- Provide support to street children, including but not limited to children who have been accused of witchcraft
- Provide education to less privileged children, including but not limited to children who have been accused of witchcraft

Stepping Stones Nigeria also provides funding, training and capacity-raising services to its partners.

In addition, Stepping Stones Nigeria carries out significant advocacy and awareness-raising work at the local, national and international levels. This is primarily concerned with the issue of child witchcraft accusations but has also included work on other child rights issues facing children in the Niger Delta such as child trafficking and lack of access to education. Our advocacy work is centred around the PACT (Prevent Abuse of Children Today) campaign.

There are four full-time staff and three part-time staff employed by Stepping Stones Nigeria in the UK. They are supported by several interns and volunteers who are unpaid.

Information on Stepping Stones Nigeria's Partner Organisations in Akwa Ibom State who are Working to Help Children Accused of Witchcraft

Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN)

The Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) is a fully registered NGO with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Nigeria (No. 27195). The organisation evolved from a small group of young volunteers who came together in 2003 to shelter children who had survived a spate of child 'witch' killings in Eket, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. They then began working to save, protect and support children who were being abused and abandoned and whose lives were at risk.

As CRARN grew, it began to aid more and more children and by 2006 CRARN was struggling to care for 30 abandoned children, many of whom had serious illnesses and other injuries such as broken bones. Children slept in abandoned market stalls and conditions were incredibly basic. Stepping Stones Nigeria first started working with CRARN in February 2006 and through this partnership rescued numerous children who had been accused of witchcraft from the streets and provided them with shelter, food and medicine.

This led to the establishment of the CRARN Children's centre which was developed with the support of the Akwa Ibom State Government and Stepping Stones Nigeria. Today over 200 children regularly access the services at the CRARN children's centre. This Centre provides security, safety, healthcare, nutrition, counselling, education and skills training to each child.

Key Areas of Work

- Rescuing children accused of witchcraft whose lives are at risk
- Providing vulnerable children with temporary shelter, education, medical care, food, counselling and vocational skills.
- Reuniting children with their families and monitoring their care
- Sensitising local communities about child rights and the need to protect all children through the Prevent Abuse of Children Today (PACT) Campaign. CRARN works with government, police, traditional rulers and community groups to enlighten people about the belief in witchcraft and to pressure key agencies to act to protect innocent children.

Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation (SSNCEF)

SSNCEF is an independent sister organisation of Stepping Stones Nigeria. It was formally registered as an NGO with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 2009 (No.272233). SSNCEF envisages a Niger Delta where all children have access to their rights and opportunities for development, and are protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

SSNCEF's core objective is to provide support and care to street children in the Niger Delta region through a number of programmes. These include:

- Providing education, nutrition and psycho-social support to street children
- Reuniting street children with their families
- Advocating for the rights of children in the Niger Delta
- Carrying out research into the issues most affecting the lives of children in the Niger Delta region in order to carry out more interventions.

Centre for Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)

CEHRD is a rural-based and rural-focused non-profit organisation founded on August 15, 1999 by conservationists, environmentalists, activists, and health workers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. CEHRD was formed to respond to the environmental, human rights, rural health, and under-development problems plaguing the Niger Delta.

CEHRD's goal is to serve as a bridge between the rural communities of Nigeria and their rights by empowering them through education and assistance.

CEHRD's work falls into 4 different programmatic fields:

- Community Development
- Human Rights
- Population and Rural Health
- Conservation

Stepping Stones Nigeria began working in partnership with CEHRD in June 2010. This project falls under the CEHRD Human Rights programme and specifically focuses on documenting and publicising cases of child rights abuses in the Niger Delta.

2: Witchcraft accusations against children in Akwa Ibom State

Accusations of witchcraft against children are a key child rights challenge within Akwa Ibom State, as is demonstrated by the following evidence. Children who are accused of witchcraft suffer significant physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual harm and are discriminated against in a number of ways. In consequence, children who have been accused of witchcraft suffer numerous abuses of their human rights.

It should be noted that although the work of Stepping Stones Nigeria on witchcraft accusations against children has focussed on Akwa Ibom State as this is where the majority of our partners are located, we are aware that child rights abuse resulting from witchcraft accusations is not limited to Akwa Ibom State or to Nigeria. There have been reports of witchcraft abuse from several other states in Nigeria including Abia, Cross Rivers, Delta, Bauchi, Edo, Nasarawa and Kaduna, and also from various other African countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Liberia and the Central African Republic, as well as from the UK. See **Appendix III** for further details, and see in particular the UNICEF report “Children Accused of Witchcraft: An anthropological study of contemporary practices in Africa”, published in April 2010.

Documentation

Stepping Stones Nigeria has documented over 250 cases of child rights abuse resulting from accusations of witchcraft within Akwa Ibom State. **Case files are provided in Appendix I.** These case files provide detailed information on the nature and extent of the abuse suffered by children who are accused of witchcraft.

**PHOTO REMOVED TO PRESERVE
ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This boy was burnt with hot water and suffered 1st and 2nd degree burns as a result, because he was thought to be a witch. He was then dumped on the streets.

Further evidence of the extent and implications of accusations of witchcraft against children is found in the significant press attention that these cases have attracted both within local and national Nigerian media and within international media.

Examples in international media:

- An article in 2007 in *The Observer*, a major national newspaper in the UK, featured details of a number of cases of witchcraft-related abuse of children that the reporter met whilst in Nigeria.
- Two documentaries about the issue – *Saving Africa's Witch Children* and *Return to Africa's Witch Children* – were produced by the UK company Red Rebel and screened on Channel 4 in the UK in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The first of these documentaries has also been shown in various countries around the world, including the USA, Australia and Europe.
- The BBC, Al-Jazeera, Reuters, Associated Press and CNN have also reported on this issue.

Numerous reports concerning the abuse of children who have been accused of being witches can also be found in Nigerian national and local media.

Examples include:

- Michael Jegede, a reporter for the *Daily Independent*, published an article on 1st November 2010 concerning the opening of a new female hostel at the CRARN centre in collaboration with Zenith Bank and UNICEF. This article details some of the abuses faced by the children before arrived at CRARN.
- The *Sunday Magazine* of the *Guardian News*, on 17th October 2010, included a lengthy feature on the abuses faced by children who have been accused of witchcraft, gathered via interviews with the children themselves.

- The *News magazine* on 12 January 2009 included a feature on abuses of children thought to be witches in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states.
- The case of the attempt to bury alive six year old twin boys due to the belief that they were witches (Case No. 013) was featured in the *Esit Eket local bulletin*, the *Punch* and the *People's Daily* on 26th September 2010, and 29th September 2010.
- The case of the murder of an eight year old boy due to the belief that he was a witch (Case No. 018) was featured in the *Moonlight Newspaper* published 17-23 August 2010.
- The *Business Day* on 12 August 2010 featured the case of several children who had been ill-treated and then abandoned due to accusations of witchcraft.

Full copies of these and other articles which illustrate press coverage of this issue within the Nigerian and international media can be found in **Appendix IV**.

These case files and media coverage demonstrate that accusations of witchcraft against children are a serious problem within Akwa Ibom State.

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ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This girl had a nail driven into her head because she was believed to be a witch. This left her with a permanent mental disability. She was found living on the streets.

It is important to note that these case files and media coverage are considered to represent only a small fraction of the true number of children who suffer abuse of their rights as a result of witchcraft accusations in Akwa Ibom State.

Due to the widespread belief in child witchcraft and consequent reluctance to report cases of abuse to authorities or NGOs, it is very probable that many cases are unreported and therefore undocumented.

It must also be remembered that the cases of abuse documented by Stepping Stones Nigeria and our partners that are provided in **Appendix I** only concern those children whom we have encountered and who have survived horrific forms of abuse. Furthermore, the majority of the documented cases come from four LGAs (Eket, Esit-Eket, Mbo and Nsit-Ubium) which are all located close to Stepping Stones Nigeria's partner organisations CRARN and SSNCEF.

We consider it to be very probable that these patterns of abuse are repeated across the state, and that there are likely to be many more such children who do not survive these kinds of abuse and whose bodies are never found. No government agency or NGO would ever be aware that such children even exist and that they have suffered in this way. **In consequence, based on the patterns, scale and nature of the abuse of children that we have documented, we consider it extremely likely that many more cases exist of accusations of witchcraft against children and abuse of their rights as a result.**

It is therefore essential that comprehensive research is carried out into the true extent of witchcraft accusations against children within Akwa Ibom State. Such research should include reports from government agencies and NGOs and should also consult widely amongst the public, taking particular account of the experiences of children. Any such research should be widely publicised to encourage the reporting of cases, and its results should be publically available.

The position of Stepping Stones Nigeria is that any abuse of children resulting from accusations of witchcraft is a serious abuse of the child's rights. Any child who has been accused of being a witch deserves proper care and attention and the perpetrators of the abuse must be prosecuted and punished.

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ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This small girl received ongoing abuse due to being accused of being a witch.

Particular attention should be directed to the following cases:

Cases resulting in death

The most extreme and tragic cases result in the death of the child who has been accused of being a witch. Such children are killed by either their parents or other community members or by pastors during the course of activities designed to extract a confession of witchcraft or to drive out the spirit of the witch from the child.

For example, in case 018 an eight year old boy from Ibeno LGA was accused of witchcraft and then beheaded by his stepfather. In case 002 an eleven year old boy had acid poured on him after being accused of witchcraft and later died of his wounds. In case 004 a boy was beaten and tortured by his community after being branded as a witch and then left to die in the local marketplace.

In case 182 a twelve year old girl was beaten with rods and cut with a machete, and was told she would be killed due to being a witch. In case 151 a boy ran away from home due to the belief that his mother was trying to kill him as she thought he was a witch.

Cases resulting in serious injury

There are numerous cases where children who have been accused of witchcraft have been subjected to severe forms of violence which result in serious injury to the child. Eighty three children (32% of the total cases documented) suffered one or more of the following forms of abuse:

- Being severely beaten (69 cases in total)
- Being burnt with acid, fire or hot water (Cases 142, 146, 257, 258, 020, 090, 001, 002, 003)
- Being buried alive (Cases 013, 196)
- Being poisoned or forced to ingest hazardous chemicals or other dangerous substances (Cases 183, 231, 265, 090, 005)
- Having nails or machetes driven into their heads (Cases 103, 265, 040, 041)
- Being raped/molested (Cases 023, 030, 056, 069, 086, 006, 009)
- Thrown into a river (Case 241)

Case studies

- In case 155, a boy from Esit-Eket was accused of killing his sister through witchcraft. He was beaten with canes and attacked with a machete.
- In case 040 a five year old girl from Etinan was cut on the head with a machete due to the belief that she was a witch.

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ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This girl was accused of witchcraft by a pastor. She was then imprisoned in a shed by her father for several weeks with her legs tied to a stake.

It should be noted that treatment of children in these ways will in certain cases constitute torture as defined under international human rights law (UN Convention Against Torture, UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights). This is despite the torture of children being prohibited under Nigerian law (Child Rights Act, part 2, clause 11 (a), (b), (c), (d)).

Children who are accused of being witches also suffer other forms of physical abuse including:

- Being chained and imprisoned (Cases 153, 154, 155, 196, 090, 091, 003, 008)
- Being subjected to starvation (20 cases in total)
- Being forced to participate in 'exorcisms' which can have a lasting negative psychological effect on the child (Cases 153, 154, 155, 183, 217, 073, 089)

Cases resulting in abandonment

Children who have been stigmatised as witches are frequently abandoned or rejected by their parents and/or community. Of the cases documented by Stepping Stones Nigeria, **81%** of children who were accused of witchcraft were then abandoned or forced to leave their home. It should also be noted that in several cases, parents who believed their children to be witches brought them to the CRARN centre. Had this option not been available, it is likely that these children would also have been abandoned.

Case studies

- In case 198, a four year old boy was abandoned alone in his home following the death of his mother as he was believed to be a witch. He was then driven away by his landlady and neighbours and forced to live on the streets.

- In case 219, a nine year old girl was found naked and badly beaten by the side of the road. She had been thrown out of the house due to the belief that she was a witch.
- In case 148, a twelve year old boy was found living on Ibaka beach. He had been living on the streets for two years after his stepfather accused him of being a witch and drove him out of the house.

**PHOTO REMOVED TO PRESERVE
ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This boy was found in a gutter due to being abandoned after being accused of witchcraft. He had very severe learning difficulties. When tested he was found to have a number of medical conditions including malaria, typhoid and worms.

If a child is abandoned or forced to leave home due to being accused of witchcraft, they will usually have to live on the streets and fend for themselves. A study conducted by one of Stepping Stones Nigeria's partners, SSNCEF, in 2008-2009, indicates that 85% of street children in Oron had been stigmatised as witches. Once living on the street, such children may face additional discrimination and abuse, particularly as they are shunned by the local community. Other community members are reluctant to assist the child as they either believe them to be a witch or fear that by helping a so-called 'witch' they will themselves become a target for violence and exclusion.

Children who are living on the streets do not have adequate food, water or shelter, are unable to attend school and do not receive medical treatment. Such children usually receive inadequate care from the authorities and it is left to NGOs to provide them with food, clothing, medical care and education.

Case studies

- In case 123, a sixteen year old girl who had been on the streets for some time was provided with medical attention by SSNCEF and was found to be pregnant. Had she not received this help from an NGO she would have had no medical care throughout her pregnancy.
- In case 121, a fifteen year old girl who was living on the streets due to being accused of being a witch was provided with medical attention by SSNCEF and was found to be HIV positive. She is now receiving medical treatment. She would not have received this without NGO assistance.
- In case 142, a nine year old boy who had been burnt with hot water after being accused of witchcraft by his stepmother only received medical treatment after the intervention of an NGO.

**PHOTO REMOVED TO PRESERVE
ANONYMITY OF CHILD**

This boy was found on the streets in Oron. He had been accused of witchcraft and beaten and cut as a result.

Discrimination

The long-term discrimination facing a child stigmatised as a witch can be devastating. Examples of this include:

- Being denied access to medical treatment (Cases 142, 004, 007)
- Being denied access to education (Cases 120, 130, 141)
- Being denied access to and participation in a local community (Cases 196, 027, 051, 055, 004)

- Being denied access to family life due to being abandoned (see section above).

This illustrates that there is far-reaching social stigma and exclusion stemming from witchcraft stigmatisation. The child becomes isolated from their family and community, becomes unable to socialise with their peers and is unable to experience the usual enjoyments of childhood. This may have a long-term negative psychological effect on the child.

Trafficking

There is growing evidence of a link between child witchcraft accusations and child trafficking. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) has carried out significant work on this issue, and has conducted a number of workshops across Nigeria, supported by funding from the Finnish and Swiss embassies. One of these workshops was held in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State on 28th-29th October 2010 and included input from various stakeholders including Federal and State government, police, judiciary and civil society. Children who have been accused of witchcraft and forced to live on the streets are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked as they are hungry and desperate, and have no-one to protect them.

In case 120, a nine year old boy was accused of being a witch by his mother and driven away from home. Whilst living on the streets he was picked up by a man known as 'Prophet' and trafficked to work for a fisherman. There are several other reports from street children of being trafficked by this 'Prophet'. This man is now being prosecuted for child trafficking offences by NAPTIP, after the case was investigated by SSNCEF.

Violations of children's rights

These cases demonstrate that children who have been accused of witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State have suffered serious violations of their rights as protected under international and Nigerian laws.

The rights that have been violated include:

- The right to life
- The right to freedom from torture
- The right to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect
- The right to education
- The right to the highest attainable standard of health
- The right to an adequate standard of living, including sufficient food, water and shelter

Stepping Stones Nigeria believes passionately that **all** children in Nigeria deserve to have **all** of their rights upheld **all** of the time. No child should ever have their rights abused as a result of witchcraft accusations.

Prosecutions

Accusations of witchcraft against children were criminalised in Akwa Ibom State in 2008 when the Child Rights Act (CRA) was ratified. Section 274 of the Akwa Ibom State Child Rights Act 2008 provides that any person, group or organisation that accuses a child of witchcraft has committed an offence and is liable on conviction to ten years imprisonment and/or the payment of a fine. Section 275 of the same Act provides that any person, group or organisation who, in the course of action intended to cure, purge or exorcise a child of witchcraft, subjects the child to any form of torture, trial by ordeal or inhuman treatment, has committed an offence and is liable on conviction to ten years imprisonment without option of a fine.

Stepping Stones Nigeria considers the enactment of the CRA with this additional clause to be a significant and groundbreaking action by the Akwa Ibom state government. We are aware that Akwa Ibom state is the only state in Nigeria to have specifically criminalised accusations of witchcraft against children.

We recognise that many cases go unreported and that often communities prefer to deal with such issues themselves rather than going to the police. This means that it is problematic for the police to properly investigate incidences of child abuse resulting from accusations of witchcraft. It is therefore essential that the public are educated on the provisions of the Child Rights Act and are made aware that it is illegal to accuse a child of being a witch. The public should also be encouraged to report any accusations of witchcraft against children to the police.

We are also aware that in many cases the police work well with NGOs and are supportive of the work that they do to support children who have been accused of witchcraft. We know that if the police find an abandoned child who has been stigmatised as a witch, they will often contact a relevant NGO to ensure that the child is cared for.

However, there has been a significant lack of prosecutions of the perpetrators of abuse since the CRA was enacted in Akwa Ibom State. **Stepping Stones Nigeria is not aware of any successful prosecutions of those responsible for making accusations of witchcraft against children, despite this being a criminal act within Akwa Ibom State. Neither are we aware of any successful prosecution of those who carry out violent, abusive or murderous acts towards children who have been accused of witchcraft.**

We are aware of some cases where the police have investigated accusations of witchcraft against children. For example, we are aware of some police investigation taking places regarding cases 020, 091 and 142.

Unfortunately, in the vast majority of cases it appears that little or no police investigation is carried out. This is despite information being provided to the police concerning the abuse that the children have suffered.

For example:

- In case 002, a boy was burnt with acid by his father and later died of his wounds due to the belief that he was a witch. This case was reported to the police and the Commissioner for Information by NGOs as well as being reported in the local media but we are not aware of any action being taken against the father.
- In case 277, a child thought to be a witch was set on fire and killed. The case was reported to the police but as yet the suspect has not been prosecuted.
- In case 013, a man caught trying to bury twin boys alive was initially taken into police custody, but has since been released and we are not aware of any further action being taken against him.
- In case 275, the case of a boy found on the streets who showed signs of abuse was reported to the police but no action appears to have been taken.
- In case 145, the case of a twelve year old girl who was living on the streets due to being accused of witchcraft was reported to the police, but we are not aware of any action being taken.

- In case 276, a pastor was accused of killing two young girls who were thought to be witches. Despite commitment from the police to prosecute the perpetrator, no action has yet been taken.

Reunification

Happily, some children who are accused of witchcraft and are forced to leave home as a result can be reunited with their family. Stepping Stones Nigeria and our partner organisations in Nigeria place great emphasis on the importance of attempting to reunite children with their families and have recorded several success stories. Between 2006 and 2010 CRARN documented over 150 reunifications, and SSNCEF documented 15 between 2008 and 2010. In cases of family reunification, regular monitoring takes place to guarantee that the child does not face further abuse once returned to their family.

We therefore recommend that the Akwa Ibom state government directs significant resources to reunification processes. However, it must be emphasised that any reunification of a child with their family following accusations of witchcraft must be regularly and carefully monitored to ensure that the child is not subject to further abuse after they are returned to their home.

Identified contributing factors to witchcraft accusations against children

Churches

It is clear from the case files in **Appendix I** that a great many children are accused of being witches by their pastor or during a church service. Of the documented cases, 31% of children who were accused of being witches were accused by a pastor. See for example cases 101, 109, 114, 124, 128, 236, 242 and 249.

Stepping Stones Nigeria is particularly concerned that some churches appear to be encouraging the belief in child 'witches'. For example, some prominent churches have produced a number of publications about witchcraft. One book includes advice for parents on how to identify whether or not their child is a witch, saying "a child under two years of age that cries at night and deteriorates in health is an agent of Satan".¹ These sorts of writings foster a climate of fear and doubt which immediately puts children in a vulnerable position. In addition, many churches conduct child 'witch' 'Crusades', which centralise the identification and deliverance of child 'witches'. This particular focus on child witchcraft is prevalent within – although not limited to – new wave Pentecostal churches. It should however be emphasised that there are several churches who do not support the stigmatisation of children as witches and that some actively campaign against it.

Poverty

Stepping Stones Nigeria considers there to be a clear link between poverty and witchcraft accusations. Many people attribute unfortunate events to the 'spirit world' rather than other causes such as climate change, environmental disasters or disease. Children from poor and deprived communities or from families which have experienced deaths or marital breakdown are those most at risk of witchcraft stigmatisation.

Several of the documented cases illustrate how poverty is a contributing factor to witchcraft accusations against children. For example, in case 047, two children were accused of being witches when their mother became sick as she was too poor to afford treatment. In case 065 a child was accused of causing her mother's poverty through witchcraft. In case 214, a child was accused of witchcraft by members of his community whilst begging due to the poverty of his family.

¹ Ukpabio, H (date unknown), Unveiling the Mysteries of Witchcraft, Liberty Gospel Foundation

Lack of understanding of disability and medical conditions

There are several cases where the child has a medical condition which is considered to be evidence of witchcraft. For example, in cases 149, 192 and 205 the children who were accused of being witches suffered from epilepsy. In case 127 a girl's hunchback was attributed to her brothers' witchcraft. In cases 108 and 111 eye problems were considered to be evidence of witchcraft.

There are also several cases where a parent or other family member has become ill and/or died and the child is blamed for causing this through witchcraft. For example, in cases 200, 201, 208, 187 and 197 sickness in the family was blamed on a child using witchcraft. In case 213 children were blamed for causing their father's drunkenness because they were witches. In cases 025, 057, 039 and 209 children believed to be witches were blamed for causing a death in the family.

There is a fundamental need for education about conditions such as epilepsy, bedwetting and autism, and regarding physical disabilities, as well as programmes of support for parents of these children in order to overcome the links between disability and witchcraft stigmatisation. There is also a key need for greater awareness-raising about conditions such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, so that illness and death resulting from these and from other diseases are not mistakenly attributed to witchcraft.

Breakdown of traditional family structures

The case files provided in **Appendix I** indicate that a large number of children who are accused of witchcraft come from broken homes. In **70%** of the documented cases the child has come from a broken home. The children may be orphans (for example, cases 194, 183, 144, 147 and 130), or one parent may have died (for example, cases 159, 164, 172 and 182). In several cases the parents are

divorced (for example, cases 114 and 156). In many cases the child has a step-parent who makes the accusation of witchcraft against the child (for example, cases 148, 149, 171, 181 and 115).

Nollywood

Stepping Stones Nigeria considers the prevalence of Nollywood films that contain messages that promote the belief in child witches to be one of the primary factors that have contributed to the spread of the belief and subsequent abuse of child rights. Films such as “End of the Wicked” clearly promote the notion that children are able to become witches and cause all manner of terrible acts in the “witchcraft world” such as spreading diseases, causing accidents and killing people.

Whilst carrying out research into the prevalence of this practice in Akwa Ibom State Stepping Stones Nigeria has frequently been referred to such films by rural community members who have watched them and used them to justify witchcraft accusations.

3: Activities of SSN

Timeline of Stepping Stones Nigeria's Work to Help Children Accused of Witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State

July – September 2003 – Gary Foxcroft carries out research programme at University of Uyo into 'Community Perceptions of the Oil Industry in Akwa Ibom State'.

February - November 2005 – Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN) is established by Gary Foxcroft and Naomi Chapple in order to help build a model school for disadvantaged children in Akwa Ibom State.

November 2005 – SSN arrives in Akwa Ibom State to begin school building project.

February 2006 – SSN co-founders – Gary and Naomi Foxcroft – discover around 25 children accused of witchcraft whilst researching disadvantaged children who may be able to attend the school. These children were all housed in a series of abandoned market stalls and were being cared for by a group of young volunteers who made up the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN). Stepping Stones Nigeria immediately offers to partner with CRARN to see how we could work together to help the children.

September 2006 – Stepping Stones Nigeria secures a grant of N5 Million from the Akwa Ibom State Government in order to build a school building and accommodation at the CRARN children's centre as well as to put the final touches on the Stepping Stones Model School. Land is purchased and work begins immediately.

October 2006 – In response to an ever increasing number of children being rescued and sheltered by CRARN (by now over 70 children), SSN and CRARN launch the Prevent Abandonment of Children

Today (PACT) Campaign in partnership with the Akwa Ibom State Government. The 1st International Symposium is held at Royalty Hotel in Eket and is attended by a wide range of stakeholders including the Commissioner for Women's Affairs and Social Welfare, Ekaette Etuk.

November 2006 – The CRARN academy school and accommodation block are officially opened.

November 2006 – Stepping Stones Nigeria's co-founders return to the UK and continue to work voluntarily to try and raise funds to support the CRARN children's centre. Funds are sent each month to cover feeding and medical costs for the children at the centre (now around 90 children).

January – December 2007 – Stepping Stones Nigeria's co-founder, Gary Foxcroft, continues to work voluntarily to develop a funding application to Comic Relief to help fund the development of the CRARN children's centre. Ongoing financial support is provided to CRARN for food, medicine, staff wages, training etc. Finishing touches are put on the CRARN academy school and accommodation block, poultry and snail farms are established and more land is purchased for future development.

January 2008 – SSN and CRARN work with two independent film makers – Mags Gavan and Joost Van Der Valk of Red Rebel Films – to document the widespread abuses of child rights taking place in Akwa Ibom state.

February 2008 – SSN arranges meeting with UNICEF Nigeria in Enugu and alerts them about the plight of children accused of witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State.

May 2008 – Over 150 children from the CRARN children's centre march to the Akwa Ibom State Government headquarters in Uyo. After many hours wait Governor Chief (Dr) Godswill Akpabio

welcomes the children and is presented with a petition from over 8,000 people demanding that children are not accused of witchcraft and that the Child Rights Act is enacted.

August 2008 – UNICEF commission a report into witchcraft accusations in Akwa Ibom State

November 2008 – *Saving Africa's Witch Children* is broadcast on Channel 4 in UK. The documentary is critically received and causes widespread shock amongst the audience. SSN and CRARN receive widespread support for their work from agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Amnesty International, various governments and individuals.

December 2008 – Governor Chief (Dr) Godswill Akpabio enacts the Child Rights Act in Akwa Ibom State makes it illegal to brand a child as a witch. The news is warmly welcomed by SSN and CRARN who rush to commend the Governor.

April 2009 – SSN's sister agency – Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation (SSNCEF) is formally registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission and launches a widespread media campaign to educate people about the belief in child witches and promote the Child Rights Act with support from the British Government.

May 2009 – Work commences on new girl's hostel at CRARN children's centre funded by SSN, who are also now covering the costs of feeding over 180 children, various staff wages, medicine, fuel and various other running costs at the CRARN centre.

May 2009 – SSN organises the Child First Conference: Preventing Abuse of the Nigerian Child Today in London in partnership with Mboho Akwa Ibom State Association (UK and Ireland). The event is

well attended including by the Nigerian High Commissioner to UK - His Excellency, Dr Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, representative of Akwa Ibom State Government, Nsikan Udofia and various civil society organisations.

May 2009 – British Government Foreign and Commonwealth Office holds a roundtable meeting in London of stakeholders to discuss the child witch issue. SSN chairs the event, which is attended by Nigerian Federal Government officials, British Government representatives, legal experts, church leaders and various NGOs.

June 2009 – The footballer Kanu visits CRARN children's centre and announces Zenith Bank and UNICEF's commitment to building a child-friendly centre at CRARN.

September 2009 – SSN revisits Akwa Ibom State with Red Rebel films to assess the progress made since the Child Rights act was enacted to see what difference has been made in the lives of the children at CRARN.

October 2009 – SSN presents a paper at the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva entitled: "Modern Day Crucible: Witchcraft Accusations Against Women and Children in the 21st Century".

November 2009 – *Return to Africa's Witch Children* is broadcast on Channel 4 in UK.

January 2010 – PACT campaign is re-launched as 'Prevent Abuse of Children Today'.

May 2010 – CRARN girl's dormitory block opens

May 2010 – SSN presents a shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva entitled: “Witchcraft Stigmatisation and Children’s Rights in Nigeria”.

September 2010 – UNICEF commissions child friendly building at the CRARN children’s centre

November 2010 – SSN launches Operation Enlightenment in Uyo Senatorial District with a music, drama and comedy tour of each LGA. A total of over 20,000 people watch the performances, which deliver the PACT message against abusing children and accusing them of witchcraft. 9,000 copies of the music album, 6,000 copies of the Nollywood film *Edikan*, 2,000 posters, 2000 stickers and 250 copies of the book *Suffereth Not The Witch To Live* are distributed for free.

Key Partners

Over the last five years Stepping Stones Nigeria and our partner organisations in Akwa Ibom State have worked closely with a number of organisations to help save and protect the lives of children accused of witchcraft. These include:

- The Akwa Ibom State Government
- The British, American, Australian, Finnish and Swiss Governments
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
- UNICEF
- UNHCR
- NAPTIP
- Bar Human Rights Committee
- Akwa Ibom State Association USA
- Mboho Akwa Ibom State Association (UK and Ireland)

- Exxon Mobil
- Virgin
- Consortium for Street Children
- Nigerian Bikers Association
- Church of the Latter Day Saints
- Various media outlets including Reuters, Associated Press, Al-Jazeera, HBO, CNN, Channel 4, BBC, The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Mirror, New York Times at the international level and AKBC, NTA, AIT, Radio Nigeria, The Guardian, The Nation, Punch, Independent, Pioneer and Sensor amongst others at the Nigerian level.

Impact assessment

Since 2005, Stepping Stones Nigeria has:

- Provided financial and capacity-raising support to CRARN which has enabled them to care for over 350 children in Akwa Ibom State who have been accused of being witches. Many of these children are now successfully reunited with their families.
- Provided financial and other support to SSNCEF to enable them to provide assistance to numerous street children in Akwa Ibom State, many of whom had to leave home due to accusations of witchcraft.
- Engaged the support of international agencies including the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF on the issue of child witchcraft accusations.
- Documented cases of child rights abuse resulting from witchcraft accusations across Akwa Ibom State and other Niger Delta states.

- Launched an international campaign (PACT) against child abuse including abuse resulting from witchcraft accusations.
- Educated thousands of people within Akwa Ibom State on the illegality of making accusations of witchcraft against children and on the provisions of the Child Rights Act.
- Supported research into the causes of child witchcraft accusations.

Stepping Stones Nigeria has also produced a number of materials designed to educate people about the abuse of child rights that results from accusations of witchcraft against children and to encourage them to stand up for child rights. These include:

- Children's book - *Eno's Story*
- Nollywood film - *The Fake Prophet* – due for release in 2011
- Academic book - *Suffereth Not the Witch to Live*
- Music Album - *Prevent Abuse of Children Today*
- Posters, stickers, T-shirts, leaflets and newsletters all conveying the PACT message
- Websites to further educate people about the issue of witchcraft accusations against children (www.steppingstonesnigeria.org ,www.makeapact.org, www.whrin.org.uk)

Copies of many of these are provided in **Appendix V**, as are reports produced by Stepping Stones Nigeria on this issue.

4: Recommendations for Future Action

Stepping Stones Nigeria believes that, through all relevant agencies working in partnership, a brighter future for Akwa Ibom State's children is indeed possible. We wish to commend the Akwa Ibom State Government for the very positive steps that have already been taken to fight the menace of child witchcraft accusations and provide compulsory free education to children in the state. We believe that these acts are groundbreaking not only in Nigeria but also in Africa. However, in order to prevent the ongoing abuses of child rights that, unfortunately still take place in Akwa Ibom State today, Stepping Stones Nigeria recommends the following urgent actions to the Akwa Ibom State Government. **Stepping Stones Nigeria also offers any assistance that we can to the Akwa Ibom State Government to enable the comprehensive implementation of these recommendations.**

The Akwa Ibom State Government should:

1. Ensure that any accusations of witchcraft against children and/or any abuse of children who have been accused of witchcraft are investigated and punished in a thorough and robust manner. It is essential that the perpetrators of such abuse are brought to justice.
2. Ensure that all police, judiciary and child welfare teams receive comprehensive training on the provisions of the Child Rights Act, especially those which relate to accusations of witchcraft against children. The activities of these agencies should be regularly monitored to make sure that they are implementing these provisions in an effective and appropriate manner.
3. Re-launch the Child Rights Implementation Committee with a clear mandate to fight against witchcraft accusations. It should be provided with adequate resources and monitored by government and civil society.

4. Undertake widespread and vigorous awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public about child rights. There should be a particular focus on informing the public that it is illegal to accuse children of witchcraft and to abuse children who are believed to be witches. Information intended to demystify medical conditions, such as epilepsy and autism, which are often considered to be evidence of witchcraft should also be disseminated.
5. Work to address the belief in child witches as it is this belief that, ultimately, leads to the abuse of innocent children. In particular, the Akwa Ibom State Government should regulate churches, and should close any found to be carrying out child witchcraft accusations and abuse. Churches should also be required to adopt child protection policies and church leaders should receive training on child rights.
6. Continue to work closely with all other agencies, including NAPTIP, UNICEF and NGOs, to maximise expertise and resources in order to overcome the problem of witchcraft accusations against children, whilst ensuring that all children who have been accused of witchcraft receive appropriate care in line with their best interests.